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NATURALISM IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

BY

JEROME REED HEAD

A. B. University of Wisconsin 1914.

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN ENGLISH

IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Jerome Reed Head

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DEGREE OF Master of Arts

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NATURALISM IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER I

NATURALISM.

Before one may treat of naturalism in the novels of George Meredith, he must first have well in mind what naturalism is, and what aspects it may assume in the hands of the novelist. Consequently, before beginning such a discussion, I will attempt to define naturalism. Were I to explain it as a philosophical conception and go no further, I should be little better off than when I began. I should have merely an abstraction, and to attack the novels with no more definite a touchstone than this would be perplexing and of little benefit. In the novel there is naturalism in a concrete form, there is very often no direct statement of doctrine, and very rarely does the writer stop and set forth his views on the subject. In the novel naturalism is made apparent in various ways; it is, however, irrelevant at this point to say no more than this; the philosophy of the novelist is revealed in the technique of the novel; and by technique I mean his choice of incident and character and his handling of these units. Thus it is evident that one must possess himself not only of a definition of naturalism, but also of some more tangible application of this definition, if he is to make any progress in the study of the novel.

In the word "Naturalism" is a broad and yet fundamental definition of the school of philisophy to which the term is applied. It is a turning to nature. "Naturalism", says Eisler, "Ist naturstandpunkt--Weitung der Natur als das Urspringliche. Allein-seiende, als die Mutter." This, in the very broadest sense, is a definition of naturalism. It is a definition inclusive, and yet vague, which may be applied to naturalism in any of the many forms. A better understanding of it can be obtained only by investigating the principles underlying this attitude towards nature.

Naturalism is no new doctrine. Democritus, Empedocles, Epicurus, Lucretius, and many others of the Grecks and Romans were naturalists. Christianity, with its revealed conceptions and its authority, obliterated the influence of these men. With the Renaissance came a renewed interest in science. The authority of the church was thrown off, and Copernicus, Bruno, and Descartes, naturalists in method rather than in conclusions, prepared the way for the naturalism that was to dominate the nineteenth century. Naturalism and revealed religion are directly opposed, for naturalism and authority cannot exist side by side. It is when the old gods fall and men turn to reason that naturalism springs up. The idea of an omnipotent God, existing somewhere apart from the material universe, the idea of a centered personality governing the universe by his will, speaking directly to men, and dictating to them their laws, morals, and beliefs--it is to this idea that naturalism is opposed.

It is dangerous to speak of movements; yet if ever there was a movement it is that of the spirit of investigation and reason, which, in the sixteenth century, dared to oppose itself to the authority of the church, and the results of which are summed up in the speculations of Descartes. In this movement which admitted the supremacy of reason and the necessity of logical proof, I see the beginnings of nineteenth centruy naturalism. As has been said, naturalism is opposed to authority- to revelation. Its roots are in reason and its first sprout is scepticism. One who accepts things on authority is forever safe from becoming a naturalist. Naturalism and authroity are directly opposed, while naturalism and scepticism go hand in hand. In this light it is im-

portant to notice that at the very bottom of the Cartesian system lies doubt. Descartes starts in with a universal doubt and doubts everything until he arrives at one principle which he cannot doubt; and then, standing upon this lone rock, in a very logical and systematic manner, he sets himself to the building of a castle of realtiies. The importance of Descartes in this; he inaugurated the supremacy of reason, and by honestly and with a marvelous genius applying this reason to the consideration of knowledge, set before the minds of succeeding thinkers the fundamental problems of philosophy. In England this method gave use to the Empirical school of philosophers, and veritably ran itself into the ground when by Hume it was shown to lead to absolute and irremediable scepticism. The following excerpts from the writings of Hume and from an essay on Hume by A. B. Lindsay* show in what way the empirical philosophy led to the regarding of nature "als die Mutter," Hume says, "Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, Nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind or by some avocation, and lively empression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras," Lindsay says** "The result is that Hume, for all his distrust of enthusiasm and his great power of subtle reasoning, was laying foundations for that return to nature which marked the close of the eighteenth century. Although, he describes poets as "liars by profession", his exaltation of the imagination as over against the abstract understanding, is the basis of the aesthetics of Coleridge and Wordsworth. If he sometimes depreciates the exact sciences,

*Introductory Essay to Vol. I of Everyman Edition of Hume's "Essay on Human Nature." New York. p. 10.

** Introductory Essay to Vol. I of Everyman Edition of Hume's "Essay on Human Nature." New York, p. 11.

it is to justify his deep abiding interest in the sciences of man. Hume and Rousseau, although they so gortesquely misunderstood one another, could be friends, they were really leaders in the same movement."

Besides this return to nature, instigated by scepticism there is a positive aspect to naturalism. Descartes in his explanation of the physical universe described man as a conscious automaton, and escaped the determinism that this theory makes necessary only by setting up a dualism wherein spirit and matter are distinct, and wherein spirit may act upon matter by contact at the fineal gland. How weak this explanation is may be easily seen. It was easily seen. Dualism was shown to be untenable and monism was left as the only choice. There are three varieties of monism; materialistic, spirirtualistic, and agnostic. The tendency, of course, for the common sense man is towards either materialistic or agnostic monism, and whichever of these he may choose leads his directly to determinism. In this conception, the universe is s mechanism; man is a part of all that is about him. He is conscious to be sure, but is possessed of no such thing as a will. His desires in analysis, are determined, and that by no such thing as spirit.

In the abolition of authority, in the scepticism of Hume, and in the monistic conception of the universe we have the foundation of the nineteenth century naturalism. The abolition of authority, the taking away of a revealed godhead, left the world in a perilous situation. When one considers how intimately the whole structure of society was related and, in a way, dependent upon this authority, how religion was not only a part of the state,

from which the state had its power, but was a part of the life of each individual in the state, one can begin to conceive what must have been the effect of the removal, or threatened removal, of this authority. The divine right of kings and the divine responsibility of the individual were no more. Government was a contract between the goverened; morality was purely relative; in fact all things were in a state of flux and there was nothing permanent. In these changes can be recognized the development of the system of utility which in all of its principles was a naturalistic system. All of society was affected but perhaps the most important phase of the movement was the light that was thrown upon the relation of man to nature. Added to the scepticism that induced the return to nature was, now, this new conception of man as an integral part of nature. The first enthusiasm led Rousseau to renounce society and attempt the leading of a natural life. This enthusiasm, which was sentimental, abated, while the principles which had occasioned it remained permanent and had an enduring affect.

In time men ceased to turn their backs upon society, and seek the solitude of the mountains and the lakes, and instead compromised with necessity and attempted to adapt their ideas to society and society to their ideas. By lowering man to the level of nature they raised nature to the level of man. Realizing the futility of "pure reason", and being perfectly sure that man was no more than a part of nature, they placed their reliance in the natural instincts--they trusted nature called it "Her" and wrote the name with a capital letter. Whatever god there was, was not apart from nature, but one with her, and was made apparent not in orthodox revelation, but in the beautiful, and in the natural

instincts and feelings. It was "that beauty in which all things work and move"..---------- " sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling in the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mond of men:
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things, therefore
Am I still a lover of the meadows and the woods,
and mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth;"

This conception of man as an organism, as a product of heredity and environment, led to an interest in the study of man and his surroundings and to an analysis of his actions. The interest, instead of being in who made the world, was in what kind of a world it was.

CHAPTER II

NATURALISM IN THE NOVEL.

To most people naturalism has nothing to do with those things which have been discussed in the preceding chapter. It is used merely as a synonym for realism. This confussion arises from the very evident similarity in the names, for whatever is real is natural and whatever is natural is real. Moreover the two are so closely related that one might say that realism is the method of of the naturalistic writer, and consequently wherever the one is found the other will also be on hand. So inevitably are they found together and so often does realism choose to portray the baser side of life that naturalism and realism have both come to suggest the depiction of the sordid, ugly and obscene. Naturalism it seems to me, if the term is to have any significance, must control a broader range and be identified with the school of scientific thought which came to the surface in the later eighteenth century and culminated in 1859 in the publication of Darwin's "Origin of Species."

The origin and partial development of this school has been traced in the preceding chapter. It now remains to show in what manner it affected the novel. The great change that was brought about by the school was in man's attitude towards nature. The arguments in favor of a personal God were fairly well proven to be invalid. Hume had fairly convinced the followers of ideas of the futility of reason. This resulted in a turning to nature either to worship or study, or both to worship and to study. Art too turned to nature and rather than treating of the relation of man to man and of actions began to take interest in the relation of man to nature and in the source of actions. In 1798 Wordsworth

and Coleridge in the preface to the "Lynical Ballads" wrote on the subject. Art was to come from observation of the every day life of everyday people, whatever was worth while was natural, and great art could come only from nature. In this we see the beginnings of realism and see in what manner realism is an outgrowth of naturalism. For the philosophers there was raised the problem of the freedom of the will. There was no god outside of nature and no spirit in the human body. Man was no different in esentials from all living matter. Matter took the place of mind and chance the place of design. The question then was, what is man and what are the sources of his action. While the poets turned to natural objects and a realistic expression of natural emotions of natural people, the novelists turned to a scientific study of character. The novels up to this time had been more or less in the nature of romances. They had depicted life, and had criticized life, but had not dissected life. They had treated life more or less in a spirit of curiosity; they had been written as correctors of evils, as political pamphlets and as mere tales, but had never treated life scientifically or analytically, for before this time life had not been a science.

In this study of character man was regarded as a victim of Fortune and the Fates. His natural passions and ideas and his perception and ideas drove him relentlessly on. He was a product of heredity and environment with an emphasis on the "product". The assumption was made that not only a man's ego, but even his every act and his ultimate fate are the purely natural results of purely natural causes, natural in the sense of their being in and of this world and this life, both of which were conceived of as mechanisms.

The more sordid of the naturalistic writers emphasized the bestial mature of man, and looking only at the lower side of life, went for their matter into the gutter and the slum. It is to these writers that the term naturalisitc or realistic is most ordimarily attached, but in truth they are no more naturalistic or relaistic than other novelists who dealt with fairer subjects and emphasized the cerebral hemispheres rather than the lower centers of the brain. The creed of the naturalistic novelist is expressed in this paragraph from George Meredith's "Ordeal of Richard Feverel. He writes,* "Now surely there will come a time when the presentation of science at war with Fortune and the Fates will be deemed the true epic of modern life,----- - At the present, I am aware, an audience impatient for blood and glory scorns the stress I am putting on incidents so minute, a picture so little imposing. An audience will come to whom it will be given to see the elemental machinery at work; who, as it were, from slight hint of the straws will feel the March winds when they do not blow. To them will nothing be trivial seeing that they have in their eyes the invisible conflict that is going on around us; whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh of ours perpetually changes. And they will perceive that in real life all hangs together, the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow that bursts upon the field of thousands, and they will cease to wonder, as some now do, that this great matter came of this small one." In this study of life and exposition of the sources of action the novelists like the poets turned to real life for their material and endeavored before all else to be true to nature. From this it can be easily seen

*Ordeal of Richard Feverel. New York. 1911. p. 189.

what is the relation between realism and naturalism in the novel.

In order to make it clear to the reader, or even to themselves, who were also students of life, what was the cause of the action, it was necessary that they be realistic and exactly reproduce every detail of the situation. They took great pains to explain the heredity of the character, the environment in which he was brought up, the ideas on which he was educated, and in the individual circumstances to state minutely all of the actions immediately preceding experiences, and to create an atmosphere that would in some way account for the action.

In France, Zola was the chief expounder of the naturalistic doctrine. His creed was,* "the affirmative of things modern, the belief in work, in scientific evolution, in people against the king, and science against faith." He, himself, believed in absolute realism to such an extent that he said that the novelist should not be a creator, but merely a photographer of society. With his notebook and pencil, Zola went into all corners of life, copying down exactly everything that he saw, and later from his notes piecing together a consecutive narrative. Zola did not aim to interpret life; it was,rather, his purpose to give a literal transcription of reality, and to make a scientific and experimental observation. With no comment from the author this literal transcription was to speak for itself. Of Balzac he says,** il ne s'appuie pas sur une verite scientifique pour en deduire des jugements logiques," and for this he criticised Balzac. In speaking of Flaubert he makes the following statement which fully expresses his own theory of the novel*** "The primary characteristic of the naturalistic novel, which Madame Bovary is a type, is the repro-

*Zola--Romanciers Naturalistes. Paris 1893. p. 70
**Ibid. p. 61
***Ibid. p. 136

duction of real life; the absence of all romantic elements. The composition of the work consists only in the choice of scenes, and in a certain harmonious order of development. The scenes themselves are taken from real life,-only the author has arranged and balanced them in order to make his work a monument of art and science. It is a true life given in the frame of admirable structure. Thus all extraordinary invention is banished after this it is perhaps unnecessary to add that he was unable to understand how Balzac could so greatly respect Scott, and that he highly approved when Balzac said of one of his novels,* "This book is a reaction of truth against fantasy, modern aganist mediaeval and intimate against incident and situation." Zola admired the plot that could be included in thirty lines.

The realism which Zola defends has two phases. In the first place the novel is to include no element of romance. As he himself says,** "The negotation of romance in the plot,the leveling of heroes to the level of common men and proportions observe in the minutest details." This realism is a broad type and has to do only with the plot and the general strusture. The second phase is concerned more with the details of exposition, and with the more minute technique. It is the handling of the man in the milieu, the manner in which he is to be shown in his entirety with his true function under the influence of the great world. Zola says,*** "The exact and precise exposition of the surroundings and the study of their influence on the individuals, these are the scientific necessities of the comtemporary novel.

*Zola- Romanciers N^{a}turalistes in France. Paris 1893. p. 64

** Ibid. p 250

*** Ibid. p. 89.

As an example of what he means by this Zola cites an example from a de Stendahl novel and in the following manner shows how it could have been treated by a writer for whom the effect of the surroundings was significant,* "Give the episode to a writer for whom the milieu exists, and in the defeat of the women he would have considered the odors, the sounds and the voluptuous sweetness of the night.

Zola's theory of realism, at least the latter half of of it is open to criticism. He believed in absolute realism, a literal transcription of life. The question must be asked, is there possible such an absolute realism. To me it seems that the answer to this question must be given in the negative, for between reality and the novelist's note book is one gap, and between the note book and the novel is another; and in both of these places the author must use his selective sense, and thus part more or less from reality. But that one does not reach absolute realism does not prevent him from being realistic. The naturalistic novelist is realistic in that he interprets life as he sees it, and it is evident that this is as realisitc as it is within the power of any man to be realistic. It is impossible for him to be completely objective. The photographer realist is unable to put himself within the individual and discern what is actually taking place, he is unable to give every circumstance of the situation. He merely observes and then recounts those things which to him seem significant in their bearings on the psychology. How then is he different from the inventor who from his imagination, it is true, selects what incidents seem significant to him?

Zola maintained that he was not a moralist, merely an anatomist and also that he did not recognize the difference be-

*Zola-Romanciers Naturalistes in France. Paris 1893. p. 90.

tween the high and low in man. Perhaps this is his excuse for choosing the low. He saw the ugly and the bestial and empahsized them and took them for reality. It is foolish to think that a novel to be realistic must deal with the ugly or that psychology must emphasize the bestiality and weakness of man.

After the discussion of naturalism in the novel, and the different practices that it led to, it will be well to sum and determine those things that are essential to the naturalistic novel. In the first place it must be a conception that the laws of nature are supreme, and that in life all hangs together, that not only man's ego, but even his every act and thought and his ultimate fate are the perfectly natural results of perfectly natural causes. It must also be remembered that realism is the method employed by the naturalistic novelist to present this conception of the universe; that it has does,as many think, mean the depiction of the sordid and repulsive; and that it does not demand that the writer transcribe from real life to his note book, and from his notebook to his novel. The naturalistic novel is one which attempts to show man in his entirety under the influence of the great world; it is a scientific study of human nature, attempting to show the causes of things, and to expose in what manner "this great thing came of this small one;" how man's ego and ultimate fate are the natural results of natural causes.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

I shall attempt to give a brief outline of the life of George Meredith, and present to the readers some knowledge of the man himself, and of his ideas, more intimate than can be obtained from his literary productions. I shall endeavor to place him in the nineteenth century, and show his reactions to contenporary life, ideas, and men, in the hope that with the help of this foundation the following chapters, which deal with his work, will have more of liveliness and meaning.

The sources of this chapter are very limited. The facts of Meredith's life were found in the Encyclopedia Brittanica, and in the introduction to The Letters of George Meredith . New York, 1912, while the rest of the matter was obtained from the volume last mentioned.

George Meredith was born in Portsmouth, England, on February 12, 1828. His father was the only son of the very remarkable couple, Melchisedek and Anne Meredith, who are described as "Old Mel" and 'Mrs Mel' in the novel, Evan Harrington; Melchisedek Meredith,a Welshman, was a tailor and sailor's outfitter at Portsmouth. Both he and his wife were in many ways superior to their station; as Meredith tells us in Evan Harrington, Melchisedek had a'presence' and his wife a 'porte.' Were one to explain the genius of the novelist, he would find its source in the sterling qualities of this unique couple rather than in anything that is known of his father, Augustus Armstrong Meredith, who succeeded 'Old Mel' in the tailoring establishment. We are told that he

was wild and extravagant. In 1824, he married Jane McNamara, and from this marriage one son, George, was the only offspring. In 1833 Meredith's mother died; the tailoring business had gone to pieces; and his father consequently went to London, leaving his son in Portsmouth, under the care of the trustees of his wife's estate. Meredith continued in Portsmouth, going to public school and attending church three times on Sundays, until the year 1842, when, at the age of fourteen, he was sent to school in Germany. The atmosphere at the Nuweid School was religious,and Meredith left Germany in 1844, a good Christian, and came to London, where he entered a law office with the intention of studying law. Through his employer he came into touch with a group of young writers and artists, who were philosophic and positivistic radicals. His association with this coterie strengthened his distaste for law. Consequently he gave only the required amount of time to it, and while not at the office read widely in the classics and in German literature.

Through Edward Peacock, a member of the group of young radicals, he became acquainted with Mrs. Nicols, the sister of Edward and the daughter of Thomas Love Peacock. Meredith and Mrs. Nicols were married in 1849. Meredith had previously given up the study of law, and he now gave his whole time to literary work. In 1849 his first poem, "Chillian Wallah" had been published in the Monthly Observer. In 1851 appeared his first volume of poems, Love in the Valley and Other Poems. After this came the Shaving of Shagpat in 1856, Farina of Cologne in 1857, and the Ordeal of Richard Feverel in 1859.

His marriage with Mrs. Nicols did not prove a happy one, and in 1858 they separated, one son, Arthur, having been born to them in 1853. This son was given to the care of the father, who with him went to live in London; thence to Esher Village, and later to Copsham cottage between Esher and Oxshott.

In 1864 Meredith married Marie Villiaumy. In 1866 he went to Italy as a war correspondent for the Morning Post. Beyond this his life was outwardly uneventful. In 1870 he purchased Flint cottage at Box Hill, Dorking, which for the rest of his life continued to be his home. Here he lived quietly working with a firm devotion to duty which was strengthened by the necessity of earning a livelihood. He went little into society, and refused absolutely to enter into the literary circles of London. To write was his business and his duty, and this business he placed before all else. Even his friends, and he had many of them, were placed second to his work. Leslie Stephen, William Hardmen, (editor of the Morning Post) and John Morley were among the men with whom he was most intimate; but besides these his friendships included such men as Dante Gabriel Rossette, Algemon Charles Swinburne, Robert Louis Stevenson, and many others whose names are now associated with the period in which he lived. It was only rarely that he would leave Box Hill to meet them in London, but there was a standing invitation for them to come down for a day. And when they did there were long talks, and long walks over the Dorking moors, walking being a pastime which Meredith enjoyed keenly until late in his life when his sickness forbade it. Of his life at Box Hill the following passage gives an enlightening detail. He writes,* " I am every morning on the top of Box Hill,

*Letters of George Meredith. New York 1912. p. 193.

as its flower, its bud, its prophet. I drop down the moon on one side; I draw up the sun on t'other.

In 1881 Meresith's indigestion, which had troubled him for some years, became acute, and he was also taken with a malady of the spinal cord from which he never entirely recovered. A trip in Italy and France cured him sufficiently so that he could return to his work, but from this time on he had always to guard his health and nurse himself that he might continue writing. In the last years of his life his nervous disease became worse, and for several years he was confined to an invalid's chair. He wrote in 1904, at the age of seventy six, "We, who have loved the motion of legs and the sweep of winds, we come to this. But for myself I will own that it is the natural order. There is no irony in nature." He died at Box Hill, porking on the sixteenth of May, 1909, at the age of eighty-one.

It was from hisown experience that Meredith was speaking when he said of William Ernest Henley,* "He had the poet's passion for nature, and by reason of it the poets fervent devotion to humanity." That which underlys all of Meredith's ideas, that which was an inspiration for all of his work, was his deep passion for nature. This passion was not one which limited itself to an appreciation of natural beauty, and found its expression alone in the making of things beautiful; but, as Meredith says of Henley, it led to a fervent devotion to humanity, and, in fact, to all things that are. Consequently he entered into the life of his times, and was alive to all the forces that were acting.

When Meredith came to London in 1844, at the age of sixteen, the work of many of the greater Victorians was well under

* Letters of George Meredith. New York 1912. p. 599.

way. Carlyle, Mill, Tennyson, and Newman were already before the minds of the English public. Meredith was of a later generation. They were of the first half or of the middle of the century, he of the latter half; and it was thus within his power to consider their work from a vantage point, having before him the hostile points of view. Since there is perhaps no better way of summing up the attitude of a man than by giving his reaction to the more prominent of his contemporaries, I shall, in the following paragraphs, attempt to do this in the case of Meredith.

Throughout his life Meredith was a consistent radical, a utilitarian. While he was still working in a law office in London, before he was twenty-one, he was a member of a group of young philosophical radicals; and late in his life he writes of himself, "myself,incarnate radicalism." But notwithstanding the fact that in many points he was with the utilitarians, there were many points in which he was opposed to them. These points can be illustrated from his remarks on Carlyle and Mill. "Mill," he says, * "is essentially a critic: it is his heart, not his mind that sends him feeling ahead. But he really does not touch the soul and spring of the universe as Carlyle does. Only when the latter attempts practical dealings he is irritable as a woman, impetuous as a tyrant. He seeks the short road to his ends; and the short road is, we know, a bloody one. He is not wise; Mill is; but Carlyle has most light when he burns calmly."-**---- "Read the French Revolution and you listen to a seer; the resent pamphlets and he is a drunken country squire of super-ordinary

*Letters of George Meredith. New York, 1912. p. 198

** Ibid. P. 200.

ability."* "He was the greatest Briton of his time, and after the British fashion of not coming near perfection; Titanic, not Olympian."

And then of Mill he says,** "It is difficult to speak mildly of one who calls John Mill blockhead." Thus we see Meredith coming a bit later than these men, led to neither extreme, believing that there was something to be gained from a thoughtful reconstruction of institutions, yet not making this his religion, but with Carlyle adhering to the inviolable law and the divinity of duty, having a clearer insight into the "deep springs of life."

In very few ways was Meredith in sympathy with the society of England of his time; and yet one cannot say that towards it he entirely lacked sympathy, for it was the purpose of all his writing to better the relations of man to man, to better this society, and lead it to a saner and more rational life. He writes,*** "For I think all right use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave the ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us; as to my works, I know them faulty, think them worth only when they point and lead to that end. Close knowledge of our fellows, discernment of the laws of existence, these lead to civilization. I have supposed that the novel, exposing and illustrating the natural history of man, may help us to such sustaining roadside gifts." English society of the nineteenth century was remarkable for its conventionality, prudery, and sentimentalism, and against these characteristics Meredith was especially bitter. In regard to this he writes, having been speaking of his ideas,**** "They are not the views of society

* Letters of George Meredith. New York. 1912. p. 333
**Letters of George Meredith. New York. 1912. p.200.
*** Ibid. 398
**** Ibid 607.

it is true. But society is kept in animation by the customary, in the first place, and secondly by sentiment. It has little love of earth and gives ear mainly to those who strive with dread of the things that are, not seeing that a frank acceptance of Reality is the only firm basis of the Ideal." In the following passage he protests against being termed cynical and makes a fine distinction between irony and cynicism. He says* "Some one--is it you?--accuses me of cynicism. Against that I do protest. None of my writings can be said to show a want of faith in humanity, or of sympathy with the weaker, or that I do not read the right meaning of strength.-- There has been a confounding of the tone of irony (or satire in despair) with cynicism."

His attitude towards his time, his inticism of it, and in what direction he would have it reformed is well illustrated in his criticism of Tennyson and Swinburne, the former representing Victorian ideals, and the latter those ideals for which Meredith himself was a partisan. He writes,** "Likewise more of Byron. He's abused, so I take him; and I'm a little sick of Tennysonian green tea. I don' think Byron wholesome,- exactly, but a drop or so,- eh? And he doesn't give limp lackadaisical fisherman, and pander to the depraved sentimentalism of our drawing rooms." Of the Idyls of the King he writes,*** "The'Holy Grail' is wonderful isn't it. The lines are satin lengths, the figures Sevres china. I have not the courage to offer to review it, I should say such things; To think! Its in these days that the foremost part of the country goes on fluting of creatures that have not

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* Letters of George Meredith. New York. 1912. p. 388

** Ibid. p. 165

*** Ibid. p. 197.

a breath of vital humanity in them, and doles us out his regular five-feet with the old trick of the vowel ending,----the curate's moral sentiments, the British matron's and her daughter's purity of tone:---Tennyson--This your foremost English poet is twenty years behind his time. Tennyson has many spiritual indications, but no philosophy, and philosophy is the palace of thought."

Morris, too, he accuses of prudery and of being far from reality. He writes,* "I looked at Morris's "Love is Enough." I looked away. Our public seems to possess the fearful art of insensibly castrating its favorites." On the other hand of Swinburne, who himself endeavored to react against the pettiness of his age and by no means feared reality, he writes in the following manner,** "Take him at his best he is by far the best, the finest poet; truest artist of the younger lot--when re refrains from pointing a hand at the genitals." As is seen in this last statement Meredith did not believe in going so far in his realism as to needlessly antagonize conservative, and he writes to Swinburne*** "As to the poems-- if they are not yet in the press, do be careful of getting your reputation firmly grounded; for I have heard low mutterings already from the Lion of British Prudery."

What is even more important in a discussion of Naturalism in Meredith, and is also closely related to what has just been said, is Meredith's conception of the place of realism in art. We have seen that he believes reality to be the only firm foundation for the ideal. In the letters, at various places, he discusses this point more in detail; and at this place I shall attempt to show what was the philosophy underlying it, and in

*Letters of George Meredith. New York. 1912. p. 240
** Ibid. p. 240
***Ibid. p. 183.

what manner it was expressed and developed in his own novels. Only a brief and general discussion will be given here, for the subject can be treated to better advantage in relation to the novels and certain statements made in their pages. Meredith was realistic in that his novels were a study of real life; he was not realistic in the baser sense of going for his material into putrid corners. In his letters he writes,* " I have supposed that the novel exposing and illustrating the natural history of man, may help us to such sustaining roadside gifts," and,**"I strive by study of humanity to represent it: not its morbid action." But Meredith's attitude towards the cruder realism was far from intolerant as is shown in the following passages. In this first one he is speaking of Zola and of a Russian novelist,*** "Oh what a nocturient, cacaturient crew has issued of the lens of the sun of the mind on the lower facts of life! - - on sheer Realism, breeder at best of the dung-fly! Yet has that Realism been a corrective of the more corruptingly vaporous with its tickling hints at sensuality. It may serve ultimately in form of corporlite to fatten poor soil for better produce." In 1888 he wrote in the same spirit to William Ernest Henley:**** "The rude realism of your verses, ' In Hospital,' has braced me. And with this breath of the darkness of life you give a note- - -

'Out of the night that covers me'

which has a manful ring to clear and lift us whatever the oppression that may have been caused. No realism frightens me. At its worst, I take it as a corrective of the flimsy to which our literature has a constant tendency to recur."

*Letters of George Meredith, New York. 1912. p. 398
**Ibid. p. 171
*** Ibid. p. 401
**** Ibid. p. 412

Notwithstanding the fact that Meredith did not believe in crude realism, it was the central point of his theory and doctrine to make his novels studies of real life. This principle, I believe, had its foundation in Meredith's conception of the universe. The Earth and all things on the earth were what he believed in. He worshipped no deity that was apart from nature. In the Ordeal of Richard Feverel he says "God is in the machine not out of it." We have already quoted him as saying, "Reality is the only firm foundation for the Ideal," and in Lord Ormont and His Aminta he writes, " We do not go to heaven by renouncing the mother we spring from; and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is best to believe that Earth knows, to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations."

The nineteenth century was one of religious unrest. With many of his contemporaries Meredith was a sceptic. He did not believe and he did not disbelieve. At one place in his letters he frankly calls himself a sceptic, and in The Egoist he writes that we do not know whether the universe is a fact or an evolution. He, as was many men of his time, was strongly opposed to the church, thinking it to be one of the greatest evils in the society of his time. He writes * "but a non-celibate clergy are a terrific power. They are interwound with the whole middle class like the poisonous ivy. Oh! for independence that I might write my mind of these sappers of one strength." And of the Christians of his time he writes** "Believers in an intervening deity will still hear the words from the pulpit as sublime, little imagining how

* Letters of George Meredith. New York. 1912. p. 201

** Ibid. p. 590

how they lower them." Of a life everlasting of the senses, he says,* "It is a sensual dream of the Creeds, whereon our good mother looks her blackest. She has more forgiveness, for libidinousness than for the smoking of such priest's opium. Those who do it stop their growth."

But Meredith did have a religion,although from the following passage one might think him the coldest of cold utilitarians. He says, "From the Pagan divinity to the Christian, I see an advanced conception, and the nearer we get to a general belief in the abstract deity- i. e. the more and more abstract, the nearer men to a comprehension of the principles (morality, virtue,etc.) than which we require nothing further to govern us". However cold this may seem Meredith was instinctively religious, and, as he said of Carlyle, say clearly into the deep spring of life. In all of the religious turmoil of his time, he never for a moment lost faith in nature. This passion for nature was in the order of revelation; it came to him by reason of his delicate senses, his poetic temperament; and hence it can truly be said of him," He had the poet's passion for nature, and by reason of it the poets fervent devotion to humanity."

With Carlyle, Meredith saw spirit in nature, not out of it. He writes**, "I have written always with the perception that there is no life but of the spirit; that the concrete is really the shadowy; yet that the way to spiritual life lies in the complete unfolding of the creature, not in the nipping of his passions. An outrage to nature helps to extinguish his light; To

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* Letters of George Meredith. New York. 1912. p. 422

** Ibid. p. 171.

the flourishing of the spirit than through the healthy exercise of the senses." In this attitude surely there is no asceticism, hoping to save the spirit by denying the senses, nor, on the other hand, is there s license for sensuality. What Meredith has striven to do is to strike a medium between Paganism and Christianity, taking the Pagan worship of nature and glorification of the senses, and mingling with it the strengthening element of Hebrew morality.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL .

In 1851 Meredith published his first volume, a collection of poems of which the most important was "Love in the Valley". In 1856 appeared his first work in prose, The Shaving of Shagpat , subtitled an Arabian Night Entertainment. This is a weird, strange tale avowedly told after the manner of the Arabian Nights , and showing a close study of their narrative style, a keen appreciation of Oriental coloring, and a fairly good knowledge of folk lore and popular superstitution. The story is an allegory and to some extent expressive of the author's person; however, it can in no way be put in a class with his later and more typical novels of which the first, The Ordeal of Richard Feveral , appeared in 1859, a year memorable in the annals of science for the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species. I mention this not merely as a coincidence but because to me it is significant of the ideas and tendencies that at that time were in the air, and because it may bear upon, and perhaps help to explain the nature of Meredith's writings. Had the Origin of Species been published a year or two earlier on emight say that Meredith had been influenced by it. The fact that the two books were published in the same year precludes the possibility of any such belief, and merely leads us to say that these were the eminent ideas, and that both books were the direct result of the naturalistic movement of the nineteenth century.

One used to reading the romantic novel, were he to

figured in Richard's wedding, is the champion of instinct and is set against Sir Austin, who is reason incarnate. In talking with him she says*, "One gets so addle-pated thinkin many things. That's why we see wonder clever people going wrong- to my mind, I think its always the plan in a dilemmer to pray god and walk forward."

From the exposition of Sir Austin's character one may also obtain a good idea of Meredith's attitude towards reason in its relation to instinct. Sir Austin as has been said had a system of education for his son. It was his purpose to govern his own life and the life of his son by reason. In a spirit of irony Meredith shows us how in all crucial situations the great author of the system in himself ruled by instinct. In the first place, in the voluptuous surroundings of Daphne's Bower, Sir Austin falls in love with Lady Blandish, and, as Meredith says, there is blossoming of the autumnal primrose . It is the irony of fate that Richard who is at the magnetic age, should happen on the scene; and seeing his father kissing Lady Blandish's hand, he is set ablaze with an indiscriminate passion for the opposite sex. Thus Sir Austin is the one to light the fuse that is to explode the bombe that is to wreck the system. At the crisis of the story when Sir Austin is sitting in the hush of his library at the spring of Richard's future, when it is whithin his power to welcome Richard and Lucy and thus avert the tragedy, he again acts on instinct. Meredith writes "He sat at the springs of Richard's future, in the forlorn dead hush of the library there, and that humming stillness in which one may fancy one hears the midnight fates busily stirring in their embryos." And the fates were stir-

*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York 1911. p. 400.

ring, they were playing with this scientific humanist even as they had played with his son; but we are reminded that "passion has an instinct that is safer than conscious wisdom", and that there are hourse when the clearest soul becomes a cunning fox." Of Sir Austin, Meredith says, "The wild beast in him was not the less deadly because it did not roar, and the devil is him not the less active because he resolved to do nothing." His pride was stung, and he determined to adopt a mask against society, It will be shown later how it was that the fates conspired to make Sir Austin adopt this mask and thus to set in motion that train of events which led to the tragic denoument. Richard's lack of experience accounts for the rest.

When the system had arrived at its tragic end, Lady Blandish pronounces the final criticism on it and on Sir Austin in a letter written from the scene of Lucy's death in France. The letter is to Austin Wentworth*. She writes, "Oh, how sick I am of theories and systems. There was his son lying all but dead, and the man was still unconvinced of the folly he had been guilty of. I could hardly bear the sight of his composure, I shall hate the name of science till the day I die.

Poor man! perhaps I am hard on him, but if he deceived himself in the belief that he was acting righteously in separating husband and wife and exposing his son as he did, I can only say that there are some who are worse than people who deliberately commit crimes." **Then in regard to the death of Lucy she writes, "Had she seen her husband a day or two before--but no- there was

*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York 1911. p. 452.

** The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York, 1911. p. 453.

glance at the title, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, would be set in all probability for a thrilling narrative is which the hero after walking through fire and swimming unsimmable rivers came in the last chapter to his lady love and lived happily ever afterwards. Of course, the reader, avid for thrilling adventure, would be disappointed. He would have no interest in watching the straws for the purpose of obcuring data in regard to the March winds that were not blowing. The Ordeal of Richard Feverel was not one of immediate physical difficulty that could be overcome by a strong arm and an unflinching courage. Rather does the ordeal consist in the passionate and natural experiences of a healthy, fiery youth who has been reared in innocence, and inculcated with idealistic notions in accordance with a rationalistic system. It is the ordeal consequent to the attempt to rule nature by reason.

Throughout the novel there is an interest in the scientific study of the sources of men's actions. It is a story of the heredity and environment of Richard, showing what were the forces that guided him in his ripening to the fixed diurnal round of maturity. Sir Austin, a rejected husband, tried to experimentalize with his son. *He had a system of education for him. "He considered that the schools were corrupt and maintained that young lads might, be parental vigilance be kept pretty secure from the serpent until Eve sided with them; a period that might be defined he said. "The main outlines of the story are as follows:-

Richard is kept at Raynham Abbey, the home of the Feverels, a quiet county-stead. Here he grows up in innocence deprived of all the experience which an ordinary youth acquires in his life at school; his passions are compressed and his mind in-

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* The Ordeal of Richard Feverel. New York 1911. p. 8.

culcated with idealistic notions of purity, justice, virtue, and so forth. As Adrian had predicted, the boy was ravenous for earth when he was left loose and very soon made his share of it look so foolish as a game pie. His passion ran away with him and his lack of experience made easy his fall when he entered London society. After this he feels himself unworthy of Lucy and refuses to return to her. He goes to France and there in a thunder storm in the middle of a forest,he is purified and spoken to by God who bids him return to his wife. He goes,but on the way to Raynham becomes involved in a duel which brings about the death of Lucy and leaves him stripped of fire and ambition. And one is made to feel that all of this is because Sir Austin would experimentalize with a human being.

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel is a story of the strife between instinct and reason. In this stage of his life Meredith seems to have been a naturalist of the type of Rousseau and Wordsworth, to live by reason was to give the rudder "to a drunken man. Instinct on the other hand, was divine; it was the voice of God, a god whom Meredith says is in the machine not out of it." In speaking of Richard he says, "Heroes however, are not in the habit of making their declaration of war at all; Lance in rest they challenge and they charge. Like women they trust to instinct, and graft to it the muscles of man. 'Tis instinct strikes. Surely there is something divine in instinct." Mrs.Berry the nurse of Richard's babyhood, who was dismissed for being present at the shedding of a tear by Sir Austin, and who later by a strange chance

*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911. pp. 362-3

another system to interdict that." And thus in the exposition of sir Austin's character we are shown that reason and systems lead only to failures, while, on the other hand, through Bessy Berry we are led to a true appreciation of the instinct and things natural. She councils Richard to return to his wife, and says*, "I has my fits, though I am a soft un, Obey me and you'll be happy tomorrow," and also, " a father's will is a son's law**, but he mustn't go against the laws o' nature." In the final chapter, Lady Blandish passes judgment on Berry in the following words,*** "I shall love that Mrs. Berry to the end of my days, I really believe she has twice the sense of any of us, science and all.

In Richard Feverel Meredith is interested in human nature from the point of view of the scientist. He believes thoroughly that man is an animal, and looking at man in this light he sees the more animal side of his nature, or since it is perhaps true that man is entirely animal, it would be better to say that he sees the more instinctive and less rational side of him. In this novel Meredith does not attach so much importance to the cerebral hemispheres as in those that followed it. Here is not so much an analysis of psychology as of instinct. The source of action is taken to be in the lower centers of the brain, the reflex centers whence they are reflected dimly into the higher regions. In this, it seems to me, that Meredith is influenced by the first flush of the scientific movement, and has not yet become to a thorough knowledge of psychology as in the later novels, where the ratiocinating power of the character quite overshadows

*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911. p. 384.
** Ibid. p. 400
*** Ibid. p. 452

the more elemental instincts.

Nothing could better illustrate this element in the novel than the handling of the characters in love. Love, as Meredith treats of it in this book, is a thing of physics and chemistry, yet for this reason it is no less divine; for Meredith has already told us that"the God is in the machine, not out of it". Richard like the plant arrives at the blossoming season and passes thence to the magnetic age. At first he is in love with all women. Then Fortune and the Fates bring him into the presence of Lucy and he centers his affection upon her. Lucy is taken away from him and like the true lover of chivalry Richard actually pines away*. "Excitement of blood and brain had done its work upon him. This youth suffered them to undress him and put him to bed, and there he lay, forgetful even of love; a drowned weed borne onward by the tide of the hours." When he recovers he feels that he no longer loves Lucy. At the first sight of her he is as deeply in love as before his illness. He himself explains it in the following manner, "Well, when I recovered I thought I did not care for her. It shows how we know ourselves! And I cared for nothing. I felt as if I had no blood." And love of this nature is not merely a sickness of youth. Lady Blandish was likewise subject to it. "Pure woman says Meredith**, have a second youth. The autumn primrose flourished."

***"Our staid elderly sister has paler blood, and has, or thinks she has, a reason or two about the roots. She is not all

*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911, p. 173

** The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911. p. 176

*** Ibid. p. 178

instinct." For this high cause and for that I know men, and know him to be the flower of men, I give myself to him." She makes the lofty inward exclamation while the hand is detaching her from the roots. Even so great a self justification she requires. Hence her circles about the dangerous human flame are wild and shy. She must be drawn nearer and nearer by a fresh reason." In this we see Meredith making fun of the reasoning of Lady Blandish who with it is merely satisfying her instinct. Clare wears herself out, grows ill and dies becuase of an unsatisfied love for Richard. "Happily". says Meredith. "Mrs. Doria saw nothing in her daughters manner save want of iron;* her pallor, her lassitude, the tremulous nerves in her face, exhibited an imperious requirement for mineral, But when her diary is finally read we find that it was her unreturned love for Richard rather than a want of mineral, that caused her pallor and her lassitude and finally her death.

Consistent with Meredith's conception of the animal functions of the body influencing man's destiny is the great attention which he pays to the stomachs of his characters. He is continually reminding us of them, and, as Adrian says of Sir Austin,** " He lays the seat of wisdom in the center of our system, Mrs. Richard for which reason you will underatand how sensible I am of the vast obligation I am under to you, at the present moment, for your especial care of mine." Adrian is won by Lucy for no greater reason than that she takes especial care of his stomach. Mrs. Berry in her homely manner, advises Lucy that "kissin don't last-*** cookery do." "Hippias Feverel " says Meredith was once thought to be the genius of the family. It was ill luck to have strong

* The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911. p. 242
** Ibid. p. 295
*** Ibid. p. 5.

appetites and a weak stomach; and one is not altogether fit for the battle of life who is engaged in a perpetual contention with his dinner." Meredith does not conceive man to be entirely driven by his passions and appetites, nor entirely at the mercy of his stomach, his liver, and his surroundings, but he does, in the novel, believe that these play a very great part in the life of most men. "Man," he says,"* is a self acting machine. He cannot cease to be a machine, but tho self acting he may lose the powers of self guidance, and in a wrong course his very vitalities hurry him to perdition. Young he is an organism ripening to the set mechanic diurnal round, and while so he needs all the angels to hold watch over him that he grow straight and healthy, and fit for what machinal duties he may have to perform." But over most men the angels do not hold watch and their war against fortunes and Fates is unavailing. "Favorable circumstances, good air, good company, two or three rules rigidly adhered to keep the world out of Bedlam. But let the world fly into a passion, and is not, Bedlam the safest abode."

In Richard Feverel , Meredith lays great stress upon Fortune and the Fates and that chance which plays so great a part in the lives of all men. He believes that every second of man's life is important and that his fate is being decided each moment. He is kind enough to give us a rather lengthy discourse on this subject and to point out to us one apparently unimportant incident which has much to do with the lives of all in the story. I will give the whole of it for it is an essential point in this doctrine

*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York, 1911. p. 108.

and goes far to explain this novel: "Now surely there will come a time when the presentation of science at war with Fortune and the Fates, will be deemed the true epic of modern life; and the aspect of a scientific humanist who, by dint of incessant watchfulness, has maintained a system against those active forces, cannot be reckoned less than sublime, even though at the moment he but set on his horse, on a fine March morning such as this, and smile wistfully to behold the son of his heart, his system incarnate, wave a serene adieu to tutelage, neither too eagerly or morbidly unwilling to try his luck alone for a term of two weeks. At present, I am aware, an audience impatient for blood and glory scorns the stress I am putting on incidents so minute, a picture so little imposing. An audience will come to whom it will be given to see the elemental machinery at work; who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow. To them will nothing seem trivial, seeing that they will have in their eyes the invisible conflict that is going on around us, whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh of ours perpetually changes. And they will perceive, moreover that in real life all hangs together; the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow, that bursts upon the field of thousands. They will see the links of things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people now do, that this great matter came out of this small one."* At this point of the story Richard and Hippias are sitting in the train bound on a two weeks visit in London. Hippias says something that amuses his companion and the latter bends over in his seat and laughs uproariously. Sir Austin, just as he is turn-

*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911. p. 189.

ing towards home, sees this laugh. "Science was at a loss to account for that. Sir Austin checked his mind from inquiring that he might keep suspicion at a distance, but he thought it odd and the jarring sensation that ran along his nerves at the sight remained with him as he rode home." Later when Richard has run off with Lucy, Sir Austin remembering this laugh, believes that his son has maliciously deceived him. On this account he refuses to see him, and with this refusal sets in motion the train which leads to the tragic ending.

NATURE DESCRIPTION

Magnus in his "Literature of the 19th century, says" The change from Thackeray to Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy depends on the younger writers attitude towards nature!' Certainly in Richard Feverell nature plays an important part. Richard just after we have seen him driven ruthlessly by his passions and his surroundings says,* "The same sort of day, I suppose my father's right. We make our own fates and nature has nothing to do with it." This, of course, is not to be taken seriously, but rather as a criticism of the system which hopes by science to manage so complex a situation. Nature, in this novel, is used in quite a different manner from that in which it is used in the novels that followed. Here the light, the atmosphere, the wind, in fact the whole surroundings affect the individual without his being aware of it. They do not pierce to the higher centers of his brain, but rather through the

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*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel. New York. 1911. p. 317.

lower centers affect the entire organism which in its changed state acts in a changed manner. In speaking of the men on Peter Crayder's party Meredith says,* "all are volage, wine, tobacco, and the moon affect them all alike". We shall see how in the later novels nature was used in a different manner. Richard's first meeting with Lucy is the best example of the present use of nature."** * Surrounded by the green-shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-falls thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The magnetic youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles and beheld the sweet vision- stiller and stiller grew nature as at the meeting of two electric clouds." Of course Richard falls in love.

Throughout the novel we have been looking at the whole body of the man, the brain being considered/ no more important than the stomach and the surroundings. We have seen how man is tossed by his body and surroundings and by Fortune and by Fate. It is not an encouraging prospect. Man and his reason would seem to have about as much chance of avoiding tragedy as the rustic gambler of locating the pea. But Meredith does not leave us with this dreary impression. He believes that good is inherent in the heart of man, that instinct is divine, and nature benignant and able to lead man to the good that is within him. It is in Daphne's Bower, a little laurel-shaded temple of white marble looking out on the river from a knoll, "that Richard first comes into the presence of this good that is his soul. Meredith tells us that***

* The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911. p.334

**Ibid. p. 96

***Ibid. p. 41.

"it was a genial strife of the angel in him with constituents less divine." And then, when the angel conquers, he writes: "The boys better spirit was touched, and it kindled his imagination to realize the abject figure of poor clodpole Tom, and surround it with a halo of light. His soul was alive. Feelings he had never known streamed in upon him as from an ethereal casement, an unwonted tenderness, an embracing irradiation of the features of humanity." Meredith has arranged an interesting antithesis of incidents in the Procession of the cake and the procession of the baby. After Richard's marriage Adrian, to enjoy the spectacle, distributes his wedding cake among the unsuspecting members of the family. All in turn react selfishly. Hippias is taken in the stomach, Sir Algennon in the pocket book, Mrs Doria thinks only of Clare whom she had intended for Richard, and Sir Austin thinks only of his shattered system. But how different a spectacle when Lucy and her baby appear. Then in the presence of mother's love all are melted and forget their particular selves, Hippias, his stomach, Mrs Doria, Clare, and Austin his system, and all welcome them. The benignant and chastening power of nature is shown most clearly in Richard's experience in the woods in France. He has just received the news that he is a father, yet still feels that he is unpure, and can not return to his wife.

"Hence fantastic vaporous! * What are ye to this! Where are the dreams of the hero when he learns that he has a child? Nature is taking him to her bosom. She will speak presently." "A father" he kept repeating to himself, "a child! And though he

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*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911. p. 423.

knew it not, he was striking the key notes of nature. But he did know of a singular harmony that suddenly burst over his whole being." He walks into the forest and is there overtaken by a thunder storm. As he walks on in the rain and the dark by a strange chance he comes upon a baby leveret half dead with the wet. He picks it up and carries it in his bosom. The tiny animal licks his arm, "what did it say to him? Human tongue could not have said so much just then."* Passing out of the forest he comes upon a rustic chapel. "He looked within and saw the virgin holding her child. He moved by, but not many steps had he gone ere his strength went out of him, and he shuddered. What wast? He asked not. He felt in his heart the cry of his child, his darling's touch. With shut eyes he saw them both. They drew him from the depths; they led him a blind and tottering man. And as they led him he had a sense of purification so sweet he shuddered again and again.

When he looked out from his trance on the breathing world, the small birds hopped and chirped; warm fresh sunlight was over all the hills. He was on the edge of the forest, entering a plain clothed with ripe corn under a spacious morning sky."

In Richard Feverell then it is important to notice first that Meredith conceives of man as being a automaton that chooses, but which chooses on impulse and instinct; second, that he lays bare to us the whole organism in its milieu ; third, that he scoffs at science at war with Fortune and the Fates and shows that science and reason cannot deal with human nature; and fourth, and last, that instinct is divine, that good is inherent in each individual, that god is in the machine not out of it, and that

* The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . New York. 1911. p. 426.

nature is benignant and leads man to discover the good that is within him.

CHAPTER V.

EVAN HARRINGTON.

Evan Harrington, Meredith's second novel, was published in 1861, only two years after the appearance of The Ordeal of Richard Feverel . The fact that this final novel was not well received, was preached against by the clergy, and labelled immoral perhaps influenced Meredith ,not ,to be sure ,through fear or respect for the opinion of England of the 60's,to make the changes in his method which are evident in the second novel. One would find it difficult to determine from internal evidence that Evan Harrington was the work of the author of Richard Feverel . There are very few points in which it is similar. In chapter one we are told that the novel is to be a comedy, not a dissection of human nature. Richard Feverel very evidently was a dissection of human nature. In comedy, Meredith tells us at a later period, one is interested only in the pursuit of the characters and their speech; but Evan Harrington is not we shall see, so purely a comedy as the book of which Meredith gave the above definition. The most noticeable difference, at first glance, between Richard Feverell and Evan Harrington is the style. In Richard Feverel the style is striking, brilliant, and as individual as that of Carlyle. It glitters with aphorisms and things said in a new way. It is the style of a poet. There are descriptions and scenes which are as lyric and imaginative and appeal to the emotions of the readers as sensuously as the greatest poetry. The style of Evan Harrington, on the other hand has few of these character-

istics. There are few aphorisms and the whole story is told in plain straightforward manner. In one or two places, such as the scene between Evan and Rose in the garden, Meredith does attempt impassioned expression; but in these instances there is something lacking and the reader is in no way carried into the actions as he is in the wonderful scenes between Richard and Lucy. Richard Feverel is followed through six years of his life and the scenes are in as many different vicinities. The actual duration of time in Evan Harrington is not more than six months, and the scenes are for the most part within a radius of eight or ten miles. Richard Feverell is shown to us as a growing plant, and we are shown always how his actions correspond to the particular stage of youth and ripening in which he then is. The book is a study in physiology. The passion of the characters are very near the surface and it is these that we are shown rather than the ideas. In Richard Feverel man's physical self is emphasized, while in Evan Harrington on the other hand, it is man's social self which has the greater importance. Evan Harrington is a study in psychology. Evan is influenced by the succession of ideas. The present is always seen in the light of the more or less immediate past. Evan's future is the result of his past. In his explanation of this psychology Meredith uses a realistic method and attempts to give us the man in his surroundings and wo o our credulity through the senses. There is no use of nature as a purifier, as in Richard Feverell, and no advice is given as to the following of divine instinct. Evan Harrinton is the study of a particular brain in a particular social milieu .

Meredith's plots are very carefully and intricately planned and developed. It is his method to outline the plot in

the opening chapters, to introduce his characters with their heredity and temperaments, and then in the following chapters to develop the problem by presenting the characters under the stress of fiery situations. And so in Evan Harrington, the opening chapters of the book give the heredity of Evan, the hero, and state the problem which he must face.

His father was the great Melchisedek Harrington, tailor and gentleman, who upon one celebrated occasion was taken for a Marquis and managed himself well in the part. He was a tailor and yet was "above buttons;" He tailored with a great gusto--presented no bills, hunted, fenced, and consorted with the great of the community. As has already been said, he had a presence, and what is more important he had pride, a pride which led him to exult in paradings as a Marquis. Evan's mother was no less of a personality than his father. While it was his father's fortune or failing to have a presence, his mother was gifted with a porte. She was loyal to "Mel" and looked upon his doings with a magnanimous tolerance. She also was the brains of the establishment. Yet for all her efforts could not keep the firm from running deeply into debt. She lacked pride, realized the dignity of the position of an honest tailor, and had conscience enough to desire to see the business out of debt. The book opens with the death of "Mel"; and the thoughts of all are turned to Evan, his son, who is in Portugal. In chapter II after we have learned his heredity, we have given us the"heritage of Evan." His father died leaving debts, his mother desires that he become a tailor and settle the business. His sisters (who have made good marriages and are fine women), and Lady Roseley hope for better things for him. These two influences play upon the character which Evan has

had given him* One of the villagers says of him, "Oh, and he hasn't got too much spirit to work and pay his father's debts. But, I suppose like father like son, he'll be coming the Marquis too. He went to a gentleman's school and he's had foreign training. His sisters over there, they were fine women." Evan's sisters arrange that he shall marry an heiress. Meredith says,** "So these Parcae, daughters of the shears, arranged and settled the young man's fate."

Thus we have given us, in the opening chapters, the character of Evan and the forces that are to play upon it. In the course of the book, we are shown how these different forces play upon him; in what manner he is tossed by his surroundings, and the Parcae, who in this book are the Fortune and the Fates of Richard Feverel. The strife is between the mother and the father as they are reincarnate in the tissues of his body. His mother, in person, plays upon her side of his nature, while his sister, The Countess de Saldar, a great general, is the external representative of his father. His mother's part of him tells him not to be a hypocrite, but he is constantly led astray by his pride, his father's part of him, and his sister's playing upon this instrument. The book besides being a social comedy is a study in heredity and environment. The environment is noted as it influences the psychology rather than as it influences the blood; but the novel is no less naturalistic for not dealing with the physiology of the subject. The interest is as much in the cause of the action as in the action itself.

From this brief outline of the story and the problem I will pass to a more detailed consideration of the psychology

* Evan Harrington. New York, 1903. p. 5
** Evan Harrington. New York, 1903. p. 24.

and technique, attempting with as few examples as possible to show what are the ideas that govern these elements, and endeavoring to illustrate the statements that have been made in the preceding paragraphs.

That the characters whom Meredith has chosen to present in this novel are less impressionable than those in Richard Feverel is shown to us early in the book. We are shown that the book is to be not so much a dissection of physiology as of psychology, that less attention will be paid to the elements which altar the conditions in the body. In the first place Meredith writes,* "This is not to be dissection of human nature." and then early in the book appears the following dialogue: The Countess, speaking to Evan, says,** "A Portuguese would have fixed the young lady long before. By tender moonlight, in captivating language, beneath the umbrageous orange groves, he would have accurately calculated the affect of the perfume of the blossoms on her sensitive nostrils, and known the exact moment when to kneel and declare his passion sonorously."

"Yes" said Evan, "One of them did, She told me"

"And you? what did you do?"

Laughed at him with her, to be sure."

In Evan Harrington the weather and natural surroundings do not have so direct an affect on the organisms of the characters as they do in many places in Richard Feverel such as the meeting between Richard and Lucy. They do play their part, but this is only to suggest, to start associations, and thus by influencing

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* Evan Harrington. New York. 1903. p. 25

** Ibid . p. 35

the psychology lead to action. An example of this is the following:* "Meantime Evan was riding over to Fallowfield, and as he rode under black visions between the hedgeways, a fragrance of roses saluted his nostrils, and he called to mind the red and the white, the peerless representative of the two (Rose) had given him, and which he had thrust sullenly in his breast pocket, and he then drew them out to look at them reproachfully, and sigh his last farewell to all the roses of life, when, in company with them he found in his hand the forgotten letter." Thus we see the breath of roses to have started the associations, which led to the finding of the letter, which in its turn, led to far more momentous happenings. In only one instance is nature description used in any different manner. It is in the love scene between Evan and Rose in the garden. Here it is used as a background, and perhaps, but not surely, as an explanation for the action. The love of Rose and Evan too seems to be deeper than were psychology. It is the cause of many of their actions but itself seems to be fundamental. Whenever the two are together they are stripped of the pettinesses that society has forced upon them and are brought back to a self that is more real than the social self--namely the self of the heart and the blood.

In Evan Harrington there is none of the Wordsworth attitude towards nature that one finds in Richard Feverel. Nature does not speak directly to the characters as it did to Richard in the forest in France. And then, too, rather than being told to follow the instincts we are shown how impossible this is for an organism possessed of a brain which can psychologize, and how ideas

* Evan Harrington, New York. 1903. p. 176.

are often more powerful than instincts. In this there seems to be a movement, which in the later novels was completed-towards a realization that the brain is as much a part of nature as the blood, and consequently that the only true way to follow nature is through a careful use of the intellect.

The effects of wine, dinner, and the body are still important, but Meredith has both chosen not to emphasize them and also has come to realize the greater importance of ideas.

In Evan Harrington Meredith shows Evan in all of his surroundings and gives all of the forces that play upon him. In the introductory chapter he gives us his heredity and environment up to the time of the opening of the story. He then shows him the milieu and explains his psychology in relation to this. An example of this is the scene in the Inn at the banquet given by Tom Cogglesby. Evan has left home intoxicated with love for Rose which the Countess has revived in his breast. He is filled with a loathing for tailordom. On the road he has come upon the abject outcast girl who has been ruined by Rose's brother. Evan thinks,* "worse then might happen to us in this extraordinary world. There was something more abhorent than sitting with one's legs crossed stitching. The thought of her actual position swamped his sickening disgust for tailordom." At the inn he becomes involved in a strange banquet given by old Tom Cogglesby. Still retaining his revived respect for tailordom, influenced by the wine, the beauty of the night, which reminds him of Rose, and goaded by the prigishness of some young aristocrats who are present he confesses to all present that he is the son of a tailor. Meredith writes,** "Indeed Evan could not have mentioned it, but

* Evan Harrington, New York. 1903. p. 101.
** Ibid. p. 123.

for hot fury and the ale. It was ale in him expelling the truth". But it was more than ale. The whole evening had been preparing him for the declaration. The aspect of the prostrate girl had stripped him of his disgust for tailordom; the contrast between the natural whole hearted yeomanry and the three prigish aristocrats coming immediately after this other experience robbed him of a bit more of this superficial social self; the beauty of the night, as he chanced to see it through the open window, reminded him of the dignity of his true love for Rose; and added to all of these, the heightening of his emotional sensibilities by the wine in him drove him to the momentous action. Thus we see that the present moment is seen through the light of the past. It is continually fluctuating and varying as the experience of the individual leads him to new ideas or forces him to look at things from a different point of view. At one moment Evan has a great respect for tailordom, and at the next, coming at it from a different angle, he despises it thoroughly. In Richard Feverel man is a victim of his passions, while in Evan Harrington he is a victim of his ideas and his associations.

At one point Meredith pauses for a moment to explain his technique. It is at the same point in the story as that at which he stopped in Richard Feverel and gave the already quoted discourse on the importance of little events; that point at which a small thing changes the course of the story. He writes*, "That small motives are at the bottom of many illustrious actions is a modern discovery, but I shall not adopt the modern principle of

*Evan Harrington, New York. 1903. p.123.

magnifying the small motive till it overshadows my noble heroine. I remember that the small motive is only to be seen by being borne into my range of vision by a powerful microscope;- and if I do more than see, if I carry on my reflections by the aid of the glass, I arrive at conclusions that must be false. Men who dwarf human nature do this. The gods are juster. The Countess though she wished to remain for the picnic, and felt warm in anticipation of the homage due to her new dress, was still a gallant general and a faithful sister, and if she said to herself, "Come what may, I will stay for that picnic and they shall not brow-beat me out of it". It is that trifling pleasures are noisies't about the heart of human nature; not that they govern us absolutely. This picnic surrendered represented to her defeat in all its ignominy." In this manner Meredith criticises the school of Zola and those who believed in microscopic realism. Such a writer, he believes, looses his sense of proportion and "arrives at conclusions that must be false." The man with the microscope, he thinks, would have seen only the desire of the Countess to display her new dress, and would have completely overlooked the relation of the picnic to the whole of the Countess's plan, how , in truth, it was a tangible personification of victory, or of defeat in all its ignominy.

But, in spite of the fact that Meredith does not support the theory of absolute realism, microscopic realism, in Evan Harrington he is essentially realistic and naturalistic. Nothing could be more realistic than the tavern scene above cited. Throughout the book the interest is as much in why the actions took place as what action took place. The book is a study in the heredity

and environment of Evan, the hero. All of his actions are made clear to us;- his mind and body are laid open, and we are shown the relations between these and his surroundings which lead to the action. The novel is naturalistic in that it shows man and his fate to be the perfectly natural result of perfectly natural causes. And, of course, a novel which attempts to show this must also make an attempt at being realistic.

CHAPTER. VI

THE ADVERTURES OF HARRY RICHMOND.

In 1865 Meredith wrote in a letter to Captain Maxse.* "I strive by study of humanity to represent it: not its morbid action. I have a tendency to do that which I repress: for in delineating it there is no gain. In all my truly very faulty works there is this aim. Much of my strength lies in painting morbid emotion and exceptional positions; but my conscience will not let me thus waste my time. Hitherto, consequently, I have done nothing of mark. But I shall. My love is for epical subjects, not for cobwebs in a putrid corner." In this paragraph there are three sentences that are of particular interest in their bearing on Meredith's technique: first, "I strive by study of humanity to represent it;" second, "Hitherto, consequently, (on account of his tendency to paint morbid action) I have done nothing of mark"; and third, "My love is for epical subjects not cobwebs in a putrid corner." The first is Meredith's own statement of what is evident in his work, the fact that in all of his writings he was a student of humanity striving to give a realistic picture of life as it was seen by him. The second is interesting when we consider the novels which Meredith had written up to this time, and which he considers of no mark. These include The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, Evan Harrington, Sandro Belloni, Rhoda Fleming . It would be a harsh critic who would say that these books are of little importance. It must, however, be admitted that with the exception of Richard Feverel which has its merits setting it apart from the rest of his

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* Letters of George Meredith. p. 171.

works, these novels do/ deal with morbid action. One can not say that they deal with cobwebs in putrid corners. But it is true that they are not epical. The last statement in which he says that his love is for epical subjects, coupled with the first is what is truly most important in the quotations given at the head of the paragraph. What then at this period is Meredith's theory if novel writing? It is above all else realistic in that the novel is to be a study of humanity. But this realism is to steer clear of analyzing and portraying morbid action,,and is to turn to epical subjects where the event being still true to life, is to be of a fairer nature and of greater interest than the analysis. It is this, I believe, that Meredith means when he speaks of epical subjects; stories in which there is a hero, and a great variety of interesting adventure which is set forth is broad strokes, with less of peering into the sources.

The Adventures of Harry Richmond. was first published in 1871. Between the time of this and Evan Harrington, the novel treated in the preceding chapter, had appeared Rhoda Fleming and Vittoria.In The Adventures of Harry Richmond one sees a change, and sees in what manner the ideas above stated have found expression. The story is a relaistic treatment of English life. Harry himself is a very ordinary and charming English youth. His grandfather is a typical English squire-- a tory, carrying the ideas of the eighteenth century into/ the much disturbed nineteenth century. Aunt Dorothy and Janet, and in fact all of the characters are characters true to life, who could be identified again and again in the masses of the English people. But there is one character, Harry's father, the like of whom had never been seen before,. He

is the central figure of the book,- a Napoleon, a genius, a captivating personality, a loving father, a lofty pretender, a scapegrace, a beau brummel, but before all else a man of ability who did what he would,and planned on the grand style. He had no moral restraint. His past was dead behind him; he lived in the future. It is he who gives to the book its epical character and leads Harry through a series of entertaining, and surely not tragic, nor morbid adventures. There is a slight similarity between the situation here and that in Evan Harrington. To be sure in Harry Richmond we are not at all interested in his heredity, but Old Mel and even the Countess might be likened to Richmond Roy,and both situations are of a developing youth for whom his relatives have social aspirations. In both books the psychology of the youth is analyzed as it is affected by his surroundings and those who are planning for him. In Evan Harrington the psychology of Evan was the chief interest. Here the greater interest is in the incident, and in what happened more than, or at least as much as, in why it happened. Whereas Evan Harrington is a story of a few weeks and its scenes are few and limited to a radius of perhaps 100 miles, Harry Richmond covers a period of twenty years, and in it the scene is now in London, now at a boy's school, now on the heath with the gypsies, now on board a pleasure schooner in the channel,or even at the court of a small German Principality. In all of the preceding novels , and to be sure in many that followed, the plot is carefully developed and the reader has a sense of progressing to an end. Here the reader is wound in a maze of fascinating adventure,- it is life, the topsy-turvy life of a youth who is led by the genius of his mighty father. At the end it is

with difficulty that one can consider that plot as a whole.

Harry is the grandson and heir apparent of a rich English squire. His grandfather bears a deep hatred towards Harry's father who eloped with, and perhaps ruined the life of his daughters. Early in his life Harry is kidnapped by his father and taken to live with him in London. That which gives solidity and lends dignity to the character of this magnificent scapegrace character in his love for his son. Harry in turn early in his life is charmed by the personality of his father, charmed so completely that he never recovers from it. The father and the grandfather have conflicting ideals and, of course, each wishes to see in Harry the realization of his own particular set. His grandfather wishes him to marry solidly and respectably, and become a conservative English squire, while his father on the other hand, desires that his son become a gentlemen, a noble, a husband to a princess. Harry is torn between these two forces, but it all points of stress, his love for his father predominates and leads him from adventure to adventure.

Having now given a brief statement of the general nature of the book, I will pass to a more detailed consideration of the psychology and the technique. In spite of the fact that in this book there is a heigthening of the interest in the narrative, in spite of the fact that the story is more epical in nature there is still a great interest in psychology. This element is treated in much the same manner as it was in Evan Harrington. The source of the action is traced to the ideas and the ideas to the milieu. Meredith believes that there is a cause for every action. In Harry Richmond he writes,* "Accident! There is no such thing as accident. If I wander out of the house with a half a dozen in

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* The Adventure of Harry Richmond. New York 1900. p. 102.

me and topple into the brook---am I accidentally drowned? If a squall upsets my ship is she an accidental residue of timber and old iron? It a woman refuses me, is that an accident? There is a causw for every disaster, too much cargo, want of foresight, want of pluck. Pooh! When I am hauled prisoner into a foreign port in time of war you may talk of accidents." Mr. Harry Richmond, Mr. Temple I have the accidental happiness of drinking to your healths in a tumbler of hoch wine." In accordance with this belief that there is no such thing as accidents, Meredith takes great pains to show to us what was the cause for each turn in the story. In Harry Richmond, as in many of Meredith's novels, we are let into the inner life of only one of the characters. The psychology of Harry is fully and realistically analyzed, while the other characters are but drawn in broad outline and have importance only as they are units in the milieu of the hero. Not withstanding the fact that the story is one of many and unusual in cidents, so truly is the psychology analyzed, so realistically are we shown the sources of the action that in no place does the story impress the reader as being improbable or the action as being uncalled for. The reader is shown minutely how each event grew out of what had gone before. As Meredith expresses it in the prelude to the Egoist, his credulity is wooed through the impressionable senses.

To woo credulity through the impressionalbe senses is to be realistic, and surely that is what Meredith is in his explanation of the psychology of Harry Richmond. It is to call our attention to the cause of Harry's going to London that he has Captain Bulsted give the above quoted monologue on accidents.* Speak-

*The Adventures of Harry Richmond. New York 1900. p. 106

ing of it later Harry says, "Out of this strange dinner at Captain Bulsteds came my discovery of my father and the Captain's winning of a wife." It will be of interest, and will perhaps explain much that has been said above to investigate in what manner these events came of this strange evening. First let the reader remember that the ruling passion in Harry's life was love for his father. He had not heard from him for sometime. During the dinner he over heard Captain Bulsted saying that the boys father was in London on the Bench. Harry was greatly impressed. Later he was carried drunken to bed, where he dreamed of his father and the Bench, and in the morning the ideas spun in his muddled head. He says,* "I wondered audibly where the Banch was when Temple and I sat together alone at Squire Gregory's breakfast table next morning, very thirsty for tea,---The fear I had of this Bench made me passingly conscious of Temple's delicacy in not repeating its name, though why I feared it there was nothing to tell me. I must have dreamed of it just before waking and I burned for reasonable information concerning it." These ideas remained in his mind,and the next day, under a pretext, he started on horseback for London. He says,** "It all tossed in my head like hay on a pitchfork. I forgot the existence of everything but what I loved passionately, and that had no shape-- was like the wind." It is interesting to note that whenever Harry drinks wine this is the result. His emotional nature is intensified: he thinks only of what he loves passionately and this is usually his father. Thus throughout the book, love for his father, as it is inspired, renewed and made vivid by circumstances and surroundings, leads him on. Later in his life he

*The Adventures of Harry Richmond. New York 1900. p. 106

** Ibid. p. 111

says*, "For when I was a child I was out in my father's arms through a winter night, and I still look back on it as one of the most delightful I have ever known. I wish I could describe the effect it had on me. A track of blood in the snowcould not be brighter." Mention of the bright track left by this night recurs again and again through the book.

The manner in which Meredith puts his characters into an atmosphere, into a vivid setting is well illustrated by the scene in which Harry and Temple become lost in London. "We had to walk,** and it was nothing but traversing on a slippery pavement atmospheric circles of black brown and brown red, and sometimes a larger circle of pale yellow; the colors of old bruised fruits, medlars, melons, and the smell of them; nothing is more desolate. Neither of us knew where we were, nor where we were going. Figures rushed by; we saw no faces --

Then the contrast

"Temple spoke solemnly, "Our dinner hour at home is half past six."

Then a man comes and peers into Temple's face.

"The man groaned, I asked him what he wanted

My son! I've lost my son." the man replied, and walked awayand would give us no answers to our questions. I caught hold of the lamp-post overcome. I meant to tell Temple in response to the consoling touch of his hand that I hoped the poor man would discover his son, but said instead, "I wish we could see the Bench tonight."

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*The Adventures of Harry Richmond. New York 1900. p. 242.

**Ibid. p.114.

In Evan Harrington great importance was attached to the fact that Evan was the victim of his ideas and associations, and that the present was always seen in the light of the more or less immediate past. In Harry Richmond we have seen the same to be true and have seen the same method used in presenting this psychology. In this latter book Meredith writes, a brief paragraph in explanation of the idea. He says,* "I see that I might have acted wisely and did not; but that is a speculation taken apart from my capabilities. If a man's fate were as a forbidden fruit, detached from him and in front of him, he might hesitate fortunately before plucking it; but, as most of us are aware, the vital half of it lies in the seed paths we have traversed. We are sons of yesterday not of the morning. The past is our mortal mother, no dead thing. Our future constantly reflects her to the soul. Nor is it even the new man of today that grasps his fortune good or ill. We are pushed to it by the hundreds of days we have buried eager ghosts. And if you have not the habit of taking council with them, you are but an instrument in their hands." This is Meredith's own explanation of the psychology of Harry. Throughout the book Harry's associations, as we have seen, are what further the action. It is the present seen in the light of the more or less immediate past that governs him. Were I writing a criticism of Meredith I should point out that in the above passage there is a direct contradiction. At the end he says, "And if you have not the habit of taking council with them, you are but an instrument in their hands." At the beginning of the passage he says, "I see now that I might have acted wisely; but that is a speculation taken apart from my capabilities." To me it seems that a

* The Adventures of Harry Richmond. New York 1911. p. 282.

man is his past. If this is so what sort of a self is it that takes counsel of his past, and is not this truly a speculation quite apart from his capabilities. Man's past then, as Meredith says is reflected in his future. This passage, then, with the exception of the last sentence, which to me seems to be a contradiction, is a restatement of the definition of naturalism, which has already been given. Not only a man's ego, but even his every thought and action, are the perfectly natural results of perfectly natural causes.

In Harry Richmond there are these points that should be particularly noticed: first, that the novel is a relatistic study of humanity; second, that the narrative is more epical in its nature than that of the preceding novels; third, that the action is less morbid; and fourth, that notwithstanding the fact that a greater importance is attached to the incidents, the novel is still a psychological analyses of the same type as Evan Harrington, and that sources of the action are realistically presented, and credulity wooed through the impressionable senses.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EGOIST.

In speaking of his novels Meredith said,* "The Egoist comes nearer than other books to the proper degree of roundness and finish." It is clear that Meredith regarded it as his best work; and not only Meredith, but most of those who are well acquainted with him are of this opinion. The Egoist was written in 1879, five years after publication of Beauchamp's career, and midway in his literary career, 1879 being just thirty years after the appearance of his first poem, ChillianWallah, in the Cornhill magazine, and just twenty-nine years before his death in 1909.

It has been noted that the style in Richard Feverel was individual, sparkling, and aphoristic. That of the novels intervening was less adorned, Meredith seeming content to tell the story in perfectly straightforward language. The style of the Egoist makes a return to that of Richard Feverel, and also an advance beyond it. It is even more brilliant and aphoristic; in many places it is involved and chaotic, and seemingly not even grammatic. There Meredith explains it by saying that thought is tough and a tough subject demands a tough expression. Whether or not Meredith can be excused for apparently mistreating the English language, for using it in a way that it had never been used before, one must admit that with close reading much can be obtained from it, and that very often out of the seeming chaos flashes a light that presents the idea in a new way, not soon to be forgotten. It is of interest to relate Meredith's changes in style to his more general changes in method, which will be discussed in the following paragraph; and if the reader will bear in mind what has been

*Letters of George Meredith. p. 590.

said of the style he will see in what way the changes in style and in method are coincident.

Harry Richmond, we have seen, was a novel of incident, in which the psychology of the hero was analysed realistically, and the man given in his milieu. The Egoist differs from this in many ways. In the first place, Meredith tells us that it is to be a comedy. It will be remembered that he made the same statement in regard to Evan Harrington, and also that all of his novels are criticisms of life. But the Egoist is more purely a comedy than any that had preceded it and differes from them in many ways, fitting in with the new definition of comedy which Meredith presents in chapter one, a definition which will be discussed more fully later on when the theories behind that book are taken up in detail. In the Egoist the chief interest is the relation of man to man, rather than in the realistic exposition of the sources of action of one character.

To the Egoist, Meredith has written a prelude "of which" he says, "The last page only is of any importance. This is true with regard to the story only, but for the present purposes we might say "of which" the last page only is of little importance. In the first pages is a criticism of realism and naturalism, a definition of the Comic Spirit, in fact an exposition of the theories of novel writings that were Merediths in 1879. And in this exposition we shall recognize changes; the importance of which can not be over emphasized in a discussion of Naturalism in Meredith. To one, remembering what has been said of the preceding novels, it would be almost unnecessary to add comment to this exposition in order to show to him what is the importance of the

ideas here expressed, what fundamental change of point of view is indicated, and what is the relation if this theory of novel writings to that which goverened the novels already analyzed. Perhaps, however, that we may have the progression well in hand, it will be well to discuss these points.

In the paragraph from the letters already quoted at the beginning of the previous chapter, Meredith has stated his distaste for the painting of morbid action and has said that his love was for fairer and more epical subjects. In the opening of the prelude of the Egoist he says, "Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life; and it deals with human nature in the drawing room of civilized men and women, for we have no dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes." This is very evidently more than a restatement of the paragraph from his letters, for here we have added the definition of comedy. It has already been noted that Evan Harrington was called a comedy; but there is a great change between the comedy of the type of Evan Harrington and that of the Egoist. Evan Harrington was more than a comedy; it was a realistic study in heredity and environment. Evan was given complete in his milieu. The interest was as greatly centered in a scientific study of the sources of action of Evan, as represented he humanity as a whole, as it was in the conduct itself. Harry Richmond is not so much a study in heredity, and the interest is more in the incident, but, nevertheless, Harry is given in his surroundings, and his psychology is traced to them; there is still the realistic transcription given for the sake of lending probability to the action. Of the Egoist,

Meredith says, "Credulity is not wooed through the impressionable senses; nor have we recourse to the small circle of the watch-maker's eye to raise in bright relief minutest grains of evidence for the routine of incredulity." "Comedy," says Meredith,"is not interested in doing this.""It is a game played to throw reflections upon social life," and, "The comic spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters and rejects all the accessories in the exclusive pursuit of them and their speech."

The prelude to the Egoist is a complete reaction against naturalist method in fiction. Meredith speaks of the book of Human Knowledge. It is the book of facts. The Naturalistic writer believes in reading this book scientifically, page by page. It is from an attempt to do this, and to do it with the watchmaker's eye, Meredith believes,that has arisen the modern malady, the madaly of sameness. Zola, we remember, had for a part of his creed the belief in"science against faith." Of science Meredith says,* in speaking of remedy for the malady, "We drove in a body to science the other day for an antidote; which was as if tired pedestrians should mount the engine box of headlong trains; and Science introduced us to our over-hoary ancestry--them in the Oriental posture: whereupon we set up a primaeval chattering to rival the Amazon forest nigh nightfall, cured, we fancied. And before daybreak our disease was hanging to us again, with the extension of a tail. We had it fore and aft. We were the same, and animals into the bargain. That is all we got from science." Very pronouncedly in Richard Feverel, to a great extent in Evan Harrington, and somewhat in the Adventures of Harry Richmond did Meredith study humanity from the point of view of the scientist,

*The Egoist. p. 2

believing that something was to be gained from investigating the mechanism of man's body and mind, that here was a cure for all ills. He has come now to believe that whatever science may say to or show to us we are the same, animals or no, and that conduct is the important thing in life. He adds,* "Art is the specific. We have little to learn of apes." He then goes on to explain what he means by art, more fully to explain the deficiencies of the naturalistic method, and the advantage of comedy. So important is this discussion and so clearly does it sum up the case, presenting Meredith's present theory, that I will give it in the whole,**

"The chief consideration for us is, what particular practice of art in letters is the best for the perusal of the Book of our common wisdom; so that with clearer minds and livelier manners we may escape, as it were, into daylight and song from a land of fog-horns. Shall we read it by the watchmaker's eye in luminous rings eruptive of the infinitesimal, or pointed with examples and types under the broad Alpine survey of the spirit born of our united social intelligence, which is the Comic Spirit? Wise men say the latter. They say that there is a constant tendency in the Body to accumulate excess of substance, and such repleteness, obscuring the glass it holds to mankind, randers us inexact in the recognition of our individual countenance; a perilous thing for civilization. And these wise men are strong in their opinion that we should encourage the Comic Spirit, who is after all, our own offspring, to relieve the Book. Comedy they say is the true diversion, as it is likewise the key of the great Book, the music of the Book. They tell us how it condenses

* The Egoist. p. 2
** Ibid. pp. 2-3.

whole sections of the Book in a sentence, volumes in a character ; so that a fair part of a book out-stripping thousands of leagues when enrolled, may be compassed in one comic sitting",----"one (of the wise men), with an index on the book, cries out, in a style pardonable to his fervency: The remedy of your frightful affliction is here, through the stillatory of Comedy, and not in Science, nor yet in speed, whose name is but another for voracity. "

This might be summarized as follows: Conduct of the individual is the important element in civilization. Science gives us facts, facts, facts; the naturalistic, realistic novelist gives us details, details, details. Thus do we accumulate excess of substance. We learn of things in particular and humanity in general, whereas what can lead to conduct is a knowledge of things in general and humanity in particular. The following sentence is especially important: "and such repleteness, obscuring the glass it holds to mankind, renders us inexact in the recognition of our individual countenances; a perilous th ing for civilization." The remedy is through Comedy which deals with the conduct of men, proposes the correcting of pretentiousness, of inflation, of dullness, and of the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among us." Comedy adopts a standard which is born of our united sound intelligences and smiles, inwardly with the brain seeing men depart from this standard. Science is interested in facts, in knowledge; Comedy in conduct. Science is interested in the source of ideas; Comedy in the ideas themselves.

In this first chapter there is no evidence that Meredith's ideas have changed in regard to human nature, or with regard to the influence of the past and the surroundings or the in-

dividual. It is evident that he still believes that not only the ego, but even every thought and act and the ultimate fate of the individual, are the perfectly natural results of perfectly natural causes. What is true is that he thinks no benefit is to be gained from a presentation of this principle and the consequent scientific study and literal transcription of details. Humanity, he thinks, should be studied in types under the broad Alpine Survey of the spirit born of our united social intelligence, which is the Comic Spirit.

As would be expected, the ideas expressed in this Prelude are those which govern the technique of the novel following: and it will now be our task to illustrate in what manner they are here made evident. The principle characters in Richard Feverel, Evan Harrington, and Harry Richmond were studied in their development to maturity. We leave them each at the age of twenty one or thereabouts. We are interested in the elements that shape their development. Richard and Evan and Harry are not types, but rather humanity as a whole and the elements in them with which we are interested are not particular characteristics or particular points of view so much as those elements which go to make up any human organism; the instincts, the functioning of the brain under the influence of the milieu, elements which are the same in all individuals. Sir Willowby Patterne is presented to us on his twenty first birthday, his character already formed. We are not interested in his development under a particular milieu, not in the functioning of his body or brain, but we are interested in Sir Willowby as he is the incarnation of a particular characteristic--Egoism, a characteristic of which Meredith says,* "Whenever the comic imps

* The Egoist. -p. 5.

catch sight of it they pitch their camps, they circle and squat, and forthwith they trim their lamps, confident of the ludicrous to come," for the egoist wanders far from the path of those standards "born of our united social intelligences."

Like Evan Harrington and The Adventures of Harry Richmond, the Egoist, is a psychological analysis; but between the manner of presentation of the psychology in the earlier books and in the Egoist is a great difference. In the Prelude Meredith, it will be remembered, wrote, "Credulity is not wooed through the impressionable senses," and "The Comic Spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters and rejects all accessories in the pursuit of them and their speech." These accessories are elements that influence the psychology . In the Egoist we are given only the brains of the characters and their actions one upon the other. It is in the ideas that we are interested, not in the source of the ideas. It is a study of the relation of man to man rather than to his complete milieu. As is told in chapter one, there is no looking through the watchmaker's eye, no realistic presentation of psychology; all is done in broad strokes, and the psychology is not that of determinism or realism, the reaction being told merely as they bear on the problem of the book, the escape of Clara from the clutches of the Egoist. If the reader will remember the scene already given from Harry Richmond,in which Harry and Temple are lost in London in the fog, and will place it beside this from the Egoist he will see perhaps more clearly what is meant by what has been stated in this paragraph.

"The idea of her devotedness flattered her feebleness.* She betrayed signs of hesitation; and in hesitating she looked away from a look at Willowby, thinking (so much against her nature was it to resign herself to him) that it would not have been so difficult with an ill-favored man. With one horribly ugly, it would have been a horrible exultation to cast off her youth and take the fiendish leap."

"Unfortunately for Willowby, he had his reasons for pressing impatience; and seeing her deliberate, seeing her hasty look at her figure, his opinion of himself combined with his recollection of a particular maxim of the Great Book to assure him that her resistance was over: chiefly owing, as he supposed, to his physical perfections."

"Willowby could not wait for the melting of the snows. He saw full surely the dissolving process; and sincerely admiring and coveting her as he did, rashly this ill-fated gentleman attempted to precipitate it, and in so doing arrested."

Thus we see that the story is one of the action of individual on individual; it is a pursuit of the characters and their speech. These points are illustrated by the headings of the chapters. Whereas in Richard Feverel the chapters were headed "The Magnetic Age," "The Blossoming Season," and the like , in The Adventures of Harry Richmond, "The Great Fog and the Fire at Midnight," "A Clear Night on the Heath", in the Egoist the chapter heads indicate the characters who are to be in the scene for instance, to choose a heading at random, "Dr. Middleton, Clara; Sir Willowby." They are the introductions to scenes of a play, or the stage directions saying enter so and so, and exit so and so.

* The Egoist. -p. 425.

In fact the Egoist, in many respects, bears similarity to the drama, for the drama of necessity must exclude all accessories in the exclusive pursuit of the characters and their speech. In the Egoist the characters are presented and speak for themselves, although the novelist, to be sure, must set the stage and describe the actions and facial expressions which in the drama are presented directly by the actor.

In this thesis nothing has been said of Meredith's attitude towards nature since the first discussion in the Ordeal of Richard Feverel . It is quite clear that in a study of naturalism in Meredith nothing could be of more importance than an exact determination of the writers ideas on and conception of nature. Between the publication of the Ordeal of Richard Feverel and the writing of the Egoist Meredith's ideas on this subject very evidently underwent a great change. It is a chage which was fundamental and yet not fundamental; it would perhaps be better to name it an evolution or a growth--something not so abrupt as a change, for it is upon the foundations laid in Richard Feverel that Meredith developed his later views. This evolution in Meredith's attitude towards nature is the same as that which was experienced by many men who lived before and after the year 1850, it is the evolution of ideas in the nineteenth century, the evolution from Rousseau to, whom can we better name than, Meredith. Allow me here to quote a few sentences from a preceding chapter on what has been said of instinct and nature in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel. "The Odeal of Richard Feverel is a strife between instinct and reason. In this stage of his life Meredith seems to have been a naturalist of the type of Rousseau and Wordsworth.

To live by reason was to give the rudder to a drunken man. Instinct, on the other hand was divine; it was the voice of God. A God, whom Meredith tells us"is the machine not out of it." "And; "In Richard Feverel Meredith believes that good is inherent in the individual, and that nature is benignant and leads man to discover the good that is within him." In relation to this it will be well to call to mind the experience of Richard in the storm in France, in which nature speaks to him and bids him return to his wife--neither in Evan Harrington or the Adventures of Harry Richmond was mention made of the benignity of nature, or the divinity of instincts. In these books there is none of the Wordsworthian attitude towards nature, and Nature does not speak directly to the characters. Then, too, rather than being told to follow the instinct, we are shown how impossible for this is for a brain that can psychologize, and how ideas are often more powerful than instincts. In this there seems to be a movement, which in the Egoist was completed, towards the realization that the brain is as much a part of nature as the blood, and consequently that the only true way to follow nature is through a careful use of intellect."

Richard Feverel was the story showing how those following pure instinct, who had they not been interferred with, would have attained happiness, are led to tragedy by this interference of reason. The Egoist is quite the opposite, being a story showing how the Egoist following pure instinct, almost succeeds in recking the lives of Clara and Vernon characters governed by the intellect. Vernon says,* " Its a dispute between a conventional idea of obli-

*The Egoist. p. 309

gation and an injury to her nature. Why, you and I see in a moment that her feelings guide her best, its one of the best cases in which nature will be consulted like an oracle." This last sentence is especially significant, and show Meredith to believe that nature should be consulted very rarely as an oracle, but more often through the interpreter, the intellect. In another place Vernon, who with Clara is the one character in the book that comic fiends dare not smile at, says* Clara having made the statement, "You expect me to be all reason!" "Try to be. It is the way to learn whether you are really in earnest." Of Clara Meredith writes,** "She was not pure of nature: it may be that we breed saintly souls that are: she was pure of will: fire rather than ice."How different is this from the conception of Richard and Lucy in Richard Feverel, who were both pure of nature and both minus intellect. Later Meredith says of Clara,*** "That was before her "little brain" had become active and turned her senses to revolt." It is the idea of Sir Willowby that set her brain to working and turned her senses to revolt and the idea of Vernon that led her first to respect him and later to love him. The following conversation is important in illustrating this point and showing what were the relations between Clara and Vernon. "You have an evil opinion of the world" said Miss Middleton.

He replied,**** "One might as well have an evil opinion of a river; here it is muddy; there it is clear; one day troubled, another at rest. We have to treat it with common sense."

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* The Egoist. p. 210

** Ibid. p. 177

*** Ibid. p. 108

**** Ibid. pp. 72-3

"Love it?"

"In the sense of serving it."

"Not think it beautiful?"

"Part of it is, part of it the reverse."

"Papa would quote the 'mulier formosa".

"Except that 'fish'is too good for the black extremity,

'Woman is excellent for the upper."

"How do you say that?-not cynically I believe. Your view commends itself to my reason."

She was grateful to him for not stating it in ideal contrast with Sir Willowby's view. If he had, so intensely, did her youthful blood desire to be enamoured of the world that she felt he would have lifted her off her feet. For a moment a gulf beneath had been threatening. When she said, "Love it?" a little enthusiasm would have wafted her into space fiercely as wine; but the sober, in the sense of serving it, "entered her brain, and was a matter for reflection upon it and him." In contrast to this is Willowbys opinion of the work. Meredith writes, "The world was the principle topic of discussion between these lovers. His opinion of the world affected her like a creature threatened with the deprivation of air. He explained to his darling that lovers of necessity do loathe the world.-------- In their hearts they must despise it, shut it up, that their love for one another may pour in a clear channel and with all the force they have."

Sir Willowby, Meredith depicts as following his instinct. In Richard Feverel there was fundamental good in human nature; in the Egoist there is fundamental evil. Meredith names

the Books of the World's Wisdom the book of egoism. Fundamentally man is an egoist and it is only through a use of the intellect, leading to a love of the world and the development of a social conscience, that he can rize from the ranks of the primaeval savage, his oe'r hoary ancestor. Meredith writes,* "And still there is no change in what men feel, though in what they do the modern may be judicious."

Thus we see it is to be the duty of the intellect to chasten the feelings. Sir Willowby is the primitive egoist. Meredith writes,** "Women have us back to the condition of primitive man, or they shoot us higher than the topmost star. But it is as we please, - - - - the poets Lesbia or the poets Beatrice; ours is the choice." Sir Willowby they had sent back to the comdition of primitive man. In this chapter headed "In the Heart of the Egoist" Meredith writes as follows on egoism, human nature the spirit, and civilization.

"Consider him indulgently:*** the Egoist is the son of himself. He is likewise the father. And the son loves the father, the father the son.- - - - - - -Yet it is most true that the younger has the passion of youth: whereof will come division between them; and this is a tragic state. - - - - - The Egoist is our fountain head primeeval man: the primitive is born again, the elemental reconstituted. Born again, into new conditions, the primitive may be highly polished by man, and forfeit nothing save the roughness of his original nature. He is not only his own father, he is ours; and he is also our son. We have produced him, he us. Such were we, to such are we returning; not other, sings the poet, than one who toilfully works his shallop against the tide,

* The Egoist.
** Ibid. p. 232
*** Ibid. p. 398.

"si brachia forte remisit:" let him happily relax the labor of his arms, however high up the stream, and back he goes, "in pejus" to the early principle of our being, with seeds and plants that are carefully weighed in the hand and as indiscriminately husbanded as our humanity.

"Poets of the other hand may be cited for an assurance that the primitive is not the degenerate: rather is he a sign of the indestructability of the race, of the ancient energy in removing obstacles to individual growth; a sample of what we would be had we his concentrated power. He is the original innocent, the pure simple, it is we who have fallen; we have melted into society, deluded our essence,dissolved."

In the exposition of these characters Vernon, Clara, and Sir Willowby we see a complete change in Meredith's attitude toward nature and the instincts, a change which is perhaps accountable for the statements in regard to novel writing, science, and life in general that were given in the Prelude. The intellect as it leads to conduct is the main thing in life; it is a strong arm struggling against the tide of rough, primitive human nature. Facts do not regulate conduct whereas comedy does.

For all comedy there must be a standard; a philosophy of life underlying it, from which the characters are judged. In Meredith this standard is nature. But nature as it is generally used is an indeterminate term subject to grave misuse. In Meredith of the Egoist it does not mean as it did to Rousseau, Shelley, to a certain extent, and many of the first enthusiasts of the return to nature, licentiousness, freedom from social restraint, and a blind following of primitive impulse in a belief that it

was divine. To Meredith society and the intellect are as much of nature as are the instincts. Only in rare instances may nature be consulted as an oracle, says Meredith, he also writes, * "And still there is no change in what men feel, though in what they do the modern may be judicious." The nature that Meredith holds as a foundation for his comedy is instinct as it is chastened and winnowed by the intellect to adapt it to life in society. The real nature of Meredith is a nature born of our united social intelligences. The purpose of life is to preserve the self. Of the Egoist it was said "through very love of himself he slew." The intellect has been developed that the self may be preserved; to show us in what manner, in the flux and turmoil of man living with man, this may be done. In Richard Feverel it was the instinct that was divine; in the Egoist it is the intellect.

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